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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000286

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP, AND DRL
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR FOR JAMES RUDE

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [ELAB](#) [KMPI](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: ATTORNEY GENERAL COMMENTS ON EFFORTS TO COMBAT SEX
TRAFFICKING

REF: A. MUSCAT 138
[1](#)B. MUSCAT 160

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a recent meeting with the Ambassador, Omani Attorney General Hussain Ali Zaher al-Helali provided several concrete examples of government prosecution of cases of trafficking in persons (TIP) for sexual exploitation. He expressed his continued willingness to cooperate with the Embassy on TIP and share statistics on TIP-related and other crimes. The Attorney General also expressed his frustration with last year's TIP report, claiming that it did not provide an accurate picture of Oman's actions against TIP, and invited the Embassy to attend a trial for men and women accused of running a prostitution ring. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) During an April 14 meeting with the Ambassador, Attorney General Helali expressed his displeasure with last year's TIP report and asserted that counter to the report's findings, Oman is taking concrete legal steps to combat TIP, particularly trafficking for sexual exploitation. For example, he said, the Public Prosecution Office is currently preparing a case against an expatriate man accused of running a prostitution ring near Muscat and forcing women - most of whom originally entered Oman as housemaids - to work as prostitutes. Helali said that the man and four to five women of Asian descent are facing prostitution charges and are in prison awaiting their court dates. He invited the Embassy to attend the trial -- "This is a case of trafficking," Helali said, "and I reject claims (in the 2007 TIP report) that Oman is not taking steps to combat it."

[1](#)3. (C) The Attorney General further stated that this is not the first time that Oman has taken action against sex trafficking. Helali claimed that while he was a Muscat-area judge in 2001, he personally helped break up another prostitution ring that involved more than 60 women working in brothels throughout Muscat. A network of expatriate men from Asia had run the business, he said, and established brothels in private homes and businesses without the knowledge of their Omani landlords. Similar to the Public Prosecution Office's current case, most of the women involved in the ring had entered Oman with tourist visas to look for work as housemaids before ending up as prostitutes -- some by choice but others by force, he commented. As a result of the case, the government confiscated proceeds from the business and the houses used as brothels, and deported the women as well as their pimps and brothel managers. Asked about a recent story in the Indian press concerning a woman trafficked to Oman for the sex trade, but who allegedly escaped her brothel after her husband tipped off the Royal Oman Police, the Attorney General said the case had not yet come to his attention but he promised to look into it. (Note: The Indian Embassy in

Muscat is aware of the story but claims it has no knowledge of the alleged events, despite being identified in the press as having played a role in the woman's escape. End Note.)

14. (C) Helali emphasized that the Public Prosecution Office remains ready to cooperate with the USG on TIP and provide the Embassy with whatever information it requires for its reporting. "Sometimes when you collect data from unauthorized sources," he said, "the information lacks credibility." He argued that last year's report contained inconsistencies and "false statements" likely made by people who "want to do Oman harm." He gave the Ambassador statistics for 2007 on crimes in Oman, which showed that the Public Prosecution initiated criminal proceedings for prostitution against 99 defendants. (Note: The statistics do not specify the charges or how many resulted in convictions (ref A). The Embassy will report in greater length on the statistics septel. End Note.) Helali reiterated Oman's commitment to passing comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation, but stated that the draft law still is with the Council of Ministers where "revisions are being considered." (Note: An official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs separately told polchief that "positive amendments" to the draft have been proposed. End Note.)

15. (C) Comment: The Embassy notes two positive developments from this meeting with the Attorney General. First, his portrayal of the prostitution cases as instances of trafficking indicates a growing willingness to recognize TIP crimes in Oman (ref B). Second, the Public Prosecution appears intent on using existing Omani laws to fight trafficking for sexual exploitation. In the cases Helali described, however, it does not appear that Oman has a system of victim identification or victim services. As a result,

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most women caught up in these prostitution rings are still primarily seen as criminals instead of potential victims, although the standard sentence upon conviction is deportation. Post will continue its positive engagement with officials like Helali - who appeared sincere in his desire to cooperate with the Embassy despite his critical comments about the TIP report - to help Oman pursue its gradual but real progress in combating and raising awareness of TIP. End Comment.

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